

**LOOKING FORWARD**

Philippians 3:13-14

**Intro:** This morning I asked you to LOOK BACKWARD with me, and our text was Deuteronomy 8:2. Tonight I want you to LOOK FORWARD with me, and my text is Philippians 3:13-14.

Years ago I had a friend in Canada, a teacher in a Bible School, who wrote a commentary on Philippians, and he gave it the title, *Paul's Spiritual Autobiography*. I don't know how he could have chosen a better title. That is what Philippians is, *Paul's Spiritual Autobiography*. And it is the most autobiographical in chapter 3. There he opened his heart to the Philippian believers, and to all of us who have had the Word of God in our hands from that day until this. It is one of the letters that the Apostle Paul wrote while he was a prisoner in Rome. But you would think from the tone of this letter that the Philippians were the ones in trouble, not Paul. His joy in the Lord had never been greater.

But there is one thing that may have been impressed more deeply upon his heart because of his imprisonment, and that he mentioned first in chapter 3 verse 12, and then he went on to enlarge upon it in the verses I have chosen as my text for tonight. It is to be seen in these words: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect."

Early in my life as a Christian I used to think of the Apostle Paul as a spiritual giant (and I still do), but I didn't think of him as still needing to grow in the Lord. I thought that he knew just about everything that it was possible for a Christian to know, and that, next to the Lord, he was about as spiritual as it was possible for him to be. And then I came to his own words about himself, "not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect." In them I saw that he had not attained perfection, that he still needed to grow in his knowledge of the Lord, and to attain greater perfection as a child of God.

Yesterday in our men's prayer meeting one of our men whom I regard very highly in the Lord, prayed that we would never get to the place in our lives when we would no longer be growing in the Lord. I don't know that I am quoting him correctly, but that was the gist of his prayer.

One thing we will all be able to say as long as we live is, "not as though I had attained, either were already perfect." That is where I stand tonight, and that is where you stand tonight. So as we LOOK FORWARD tonight,

that is where we stand. None of us is perfect in our knowledge of God and His Word, and none of us has reached perfection in our lives. We all have a ways to go. And perhaps the Spirit of God led Paul to write those words so that we would realize, if Paul were where he said he was, then we are, too.

However, one big difference between Paul and many of us is that he not only said it, but he was prepared to do something about it. And so he went on to say,

But I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:12b).

Paul was in pursuit of that purpose that the Lord had in saving him. Paul was describing his salvation when he said that he was “apprehended of Christ Jesus,” or, *by Christ Jesus*.

I was interested in what F. B. Meyer, who was a contemporary of Spurgeon in London, had to say about this statement. These are his words:

After all, is this not conversion? We grasp the hand of Christ because He has grasped ours, we are apprehended to live after the highest and noblest ideals because his hand has been laid upon us in arrest (*The Epistle to the Philippians*, p. 172).

He also said this:

When a man turns to God, the first thing he realises is that throughout the wild wanderings of his youth, and amid all the fret and war of his manhood, even when he has been most stubborn and rebellious, God’s love has never ceased to seek him... We love because we were first loved; we seek because we were sought; we leave our far country, not only because hunger impels, but because frequent missives from our Father’s house tell us that He cannot be at rest until we are...seated at His table (*Op. cit.*, p. 171).

Paul was not seeking the Lord when the Lord struck him down on the road to Damascus, but the Lord was seeking him, and found him, and drew him to Himself, and forever transformed his life. And the One he had hated so much before, the Lord Jesus Christ, became his dearest Friend and his greatest Ideal, the One he wanted to be like.

We ought to speak of ourselves as people who have been *apprehended by Christ*.

But the expression implies not only that the Lord has laid hold of us and stopped us from going on to hell, but that He has had a marvelous purpose in apprehending us. And that is what Paul was talking about when he said

in verse 12, “not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.” Paul knew what that purpose was, and he knew that God’s purpose in saving him had not been fully realized. He was not what he had been, and he certainly was not what he might have been, but he was not yet what God wanted him to be, or what he at that moment wanted more than even his release from that Roman prison. However, He was at that moment pursuing the purpose of God in his salvation. As the Apostle Paul LOOKED FORWARD from the year in which he was writing, which was probably about 60 A.D., this is what he wanted. And to see how much he wanted it, we turn now to verses 13 and 14 of this same third chapter of Philippians.

The first thing we have is,

**I. PAUL’S RESTATEMENT OF HIS SPIRITUAL CONDITION:  
“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended.”**

I spoke this morning about the new year as a time when people are taking inventory. Business people take inventory of their businesses, and, hopefully, people take inventory of their lives. Well, this word “count” means that Paul had taken inventory of his life, and he had come to the conclusion that he was not all that he wanted to be. But, what is more important, he was not all that God wanted him to be. He could see some very real spiritual needs in his life, and it concerned him greatly. He knew why the Lord had “apprehended” him, and that purpose had not yet been realized.

This leads me to ask, “Have I taken inventory of where I am spiritually? And if I have, am I willing to admit what the Apostle Paul admitted? He wanted to be an example to the people of God, but at this point in his life he wanted to be a better example. And so he had to face the fact that he was not spiritually where he wanted to be. That is a conviction we ought to have about ourselves continually. If not, we will not be able to say what the Apostle Paul went on to say. What was it?

**II. PAUL’S ONE MAIN OBJECTIVE IN HIS LIFE: “But this one thing I do.”**

It is probably true of all of us that there is one thing in our lives that is more important to us than anything else. The question is, What is it? With Paul it was his relationship with his Lord.. If it were true that he was not all that the Lord wanted him to be, then he was prepared to do something about it. And that is what was so wonderful about what Paul had to

say here in this passage. It does not mean that he was responsible for his own sanctification, but it does mean that God had given him the means for his sanctification, and he had purposed in his heart that he was not going to stay where he had been spiritually. It is not that there was any major thing wrong in Paul's life, but it was that things needed to be better than they were.

Two other people in the Bible were concerned about this *one important thing* that we all should be concerned about to the point that it is more important to them than anything else.

One of these was David. You probably will remember his words, but let me read them to you again. You will find them in Psa. 27:4:

One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.

The other was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. The Lord had come to their house, and Martha was irritated with Mary because Mary was not helping her prepare a meal for the Lord. And so Martha asked the Lord to tell Mary to help her. And this is how the Lord responded to Martha:

41 And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things:

42 But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her (Luke 10:41-42).

We all are sympathetic with Martha, and the Lord was not rebuking Martha for wanting to serve the Lord. But the question is, What is the most important—what we do for the Lord, or what the Lord does for us? The Lord said, “One thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” The Lord meant that there is really one thing that we cannot and must not do without, and that is the time we spend at the Lord's feet listening to His word.

Job's word of conviction is important at this point. He said,  
Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food (Job 23:12).

The people of God in Scripture are unanimous in their conviction of what is the most important thing in our lives if we are to pursue the purpose of God that He has in saving us.

But such an objective requires two things:

**A. “Forgetting those things which are behind.”**

This morning I spoke to you about remembering all of the ways of the Lord with us in the past. And that is most important. We learn from what the Lord has done for us and with us. But if we are to make progress in our lives as Christians, there are some things that we need to forget—and many of these are things that are good in themselves. In Paul’s case, what were those things that he was talking about?

Well, the place to look for them is right where we are. And so if we look back through the chapter, we find that Paul, in verse 7, wrote about some things that previously had been “gain to me.” And he had just finished saying what they were in verses 5 and 6.

Paul had done some very bad things before he was saved. Believers had been arrested, and very likely many of them had been put to death. But he had done all of that thinking that he was doing God a service. And what he mentioned in verses 5 and 6 are all commendable things in their place. (Read.)

But why did Paul now feel that he needed to forget them. It was because he had looked upon those things as giving him merit with God. Perhaps Paul was saying here that just after he was saved he had looked upon those as being the reason that the Lord had saved him. If so, he was yet to learn the meaning of the word *grace*. Paul had to learn, as we all do, that the Lord did not save him for any good thing in him (because there was no good). And so he needed, and we need, to forget those things which we may feel had a part in our salvation, and see that what God has done in all of our hearts has been *by grace alone*. Spiritually we are totally bankrupt apart from Christ. That is the inventory of one who doesn’t know the Lord, and that is the inventory we have who know the Lord—if we are looking for that which commends us to God. Our standing before God is 100% in Christ. And so one of the first steps we must take in advancing in our relationship with the Lord is to *forget those things which are behind*. And I might add, forgetting the bad as well as what we might think are the good. “Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to Thy Cross I cling,” is the ground upon which we come to the Lord.

But the next step is:

**B. “Reaching forth unto those things which are before.”**

Tonight we are LOOKING FORWARD. Great things are ahead of us. How anxious are you, how anxious am I, for those things which are before us? Perhaps what we need to do is to ask the Lord to give us a real desire for the attainment of that very purpose for which the Lord laid hold of us when we were saved. Do we hunger and thirst for righteousness?

Here picture a runner who is running in competition with others, and how stretches himself out to be the first to cross the finish line! How wonderful it is to see a child of God who is always reaching forth! Such a person never can seem to get enough of the Word, or of the Lord.

But there is a third point that the Apostle Paul was making.

**C. “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”**

“Press” is the same word that in verse 12 is translated “follow after.” It is to run after something like you would if it could get away from you. Does that describe us as it described the Apostle Paul.

What is “the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”? It is the attainment of absolute perfection. It is to be made like the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul expressed what it means in the last two verses of this chapter, Phil. 3, verses 20 and 21. (Read.) This is the purpose God had in mind when He laid hold of each one of us, and saved us. Paul had not attained, and neither have we. But we need to be pressing on.

What does a Christian do if he is pressing on? Let me suggest four things, and you can see these all through the Scriptures:

- 1) He read and meditates continually on the Word of God.
- 2) He prays, prays much, prays continually.
- 3) He is careful to live in obedience to the Word of God.
- 4) He faithfully meets with the people of God for His own instruction and encouragement and fellowship which is so important to every child of God. All you have to do to see this even in the life of the Apostle Paul is to read his epistles. He loved the fellowship of the people of God. When he was in prison, letters helped to supply that need.

**Concl:** We have been thinking tonight about the Apostle Paul. This was what he was continually LOOKING FORWARD to. This is not just an annual exercise, but a daily exercise. Even as we are here tonight, we ought to be looking forward to another time in the Word before we go to bed, and then time, even though it be brief, when we can pray to the Lord,

thanking Him for what He has done for us today, and asking that if He gives us another day, it would be a day in which our main concern will be to live according to His will which we find in His Word. And then go home LOOKING FORWARD to the next time we can be together to talk about the Lord and to enjoy that special fellowship which only we as the people of God can have.

So our word for 1998 is, *Keep pressing on! Seek greater likeness to Christ, and use the means that He has given us for our perfection. Only He can make them effective in our lives. That is why we need to pray for His blessing and trust Him to fulfill His purpose in us as day by day we seek to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*